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ABSTRACT

Research was conducted to assess teacher attitudes towards genetic I.Q. and to ascertain the extent of the teachers' knowledge of their students' I.Q. scores. Teacher attitudes were assessed via a 20-item questionnaire administered to 225 private and public school teachers in the southeast and northeast. Findings revealed that private shcool teachers were more likely to profess a belief in genetic I.Q. than public school teachers, and older teachers professed a stronger belief in genetic I.Q. than younger teachers. (Author/PK)

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Teacher Attitudes Concerning the Nature of Intelligence

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A questionnaire administered to 225 private and public school teachers, teaching in the southeast and northeast revealed that private school teachers were more likely to profess a belief in genetic I.Q. than public school teachers. This result was discussed in terms of an elitist attitude encouraged in private institutions.

Whether it's Pearson (1906) writing at the turn of the century or Herrnstein (1971) in the 1970's the message is clearly the same... more than 80% of individual variation in I.Q. scores is genetically determined. Unfortunately, this unsupported notion, unlike most "scientific" beliefs, has been used as a political tool to oppress most if not all of our society's religious, ethnic, and racial minorities (Kamin, 1974).

The question asked here is whether our teachers have also accepted the notion that the primary determinant of a child's I.Q. is genetic. If teachers' preconceived notions of a young child's educability is based on their knowledge (or assumed knowledge) of the child's I.Q. and teachers assume that I.Q. scores reflect a fixed, inborn mental capacity, then many children's education might be severely impeded. Certainly if teachers accept the notion of genetically determined mental capacities they are more likely to "throw in the towel" on a poorly performing child than if they accept an environmentalist belief system.

The primary purpose of the present study was to assess teacher attitudes towards genetic I.Q. and to ascertain the extent of the teachers' knowledge of their student's I.Q. scores.

The design consisted of a 2 (private versus public school teachers) x 2 (northeastern versus southeastern schools) x 2 (teachers over versus teachers under 30 years old) factorial design. We assessed teacher attitudes via a 20-item questionnaire.

The public versus private school teacher factor was selected for two reasons: (1) The word private itself connotes elitism, exclusiveness, and separatism. (2) Private relative to public schools typically advertise

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exclusiveness. If one assumes that attitudes of genetic I.Q. and the tendency to categorize people into "good-bad," "superior-inferior," dichotomies are positively correlated (Kamin, 1974) then it is plausible to assume that private school teachers are more likely to espouse a genetic attitude than public school teachers.

We selected northeastern versus southeastern teachers because of the assumption that the former geographic region is a more liberal and a more egalitarian society than the latter. By definition the more liberal a person's political and social views the more likely that person will deny an inborn superiority. (Prothro, 1952).

The over versus under 30 year old teacher factor was selected because of our assumption that younger persons profess a more liberal attitude than older ones (Horowitz, 1947).

Method

Seven-hundred and forty three questionnaires were distributed to public and private high schools and elementary schools in Charlotte, North Carolina and Boston, Massachusetts (includes bordering areas). Thirty percent of the questionnaires were returned (225 respondents) and of those responding 20% failed to answer one or more questions.

Procedure

The southern questionnaire consisted of 20 items and the northeastern consisted of 25. The additional questions on the northeastern were four filler items and one question pertaining to racial intelligence. About half of all questions were filler items. Each question offered 5 choices as illustrated in the examples that follow:

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"What percent of a child's intelligence is a product of their parent's genetic history?"

1	2	3	4	5
100%	75%	50%	25%	0%

"What percent of I.Q. is genetically determined?"

1	2	3	4	5
0%	25%	50%	75%	100%

"Describe your knowledge of your student's I.Q. scores."

1	2	3	4	5
I know the I.Q. of each child	I know most	Familiar with 50%	Familiar with few	I don't know any I.Q. scores

For each question the teachers were asked to respond on a 5-point scale. The questionnaires were given to the school principals who were asked to distribute and return them in two weeks. The southeastern sample was assessed during the months of November and December, 1975 and the northeastern one during April and May, 1977. Over 90% of the respondents were female and more than 95% were Euro-American.

Results and Discussion

Mean scale point averages were then calculated for each question within each experimental subgroup. A 2 (public versus private schools) x 2 (northeast versus southeast region) x 2 (under 30 versus over 30 years of age) harmonic mean analysis of variance was performed on the responses for each question.

The two questions of primary interest were.... "What percent of a child's intelligence is a product of their parent's genetic history?"

(Question # 11); and, "What percent of I.Q. is genetically determined?" (Question # 16). The resulting analysis of variance performed on the teacher's mean responses were quite similar, i.e., private school teachers (Questions # 11 and # 16 mean response = 60%) were more inclined to profess a belief in the genetic I.Q. model than public school teachers (mean = 39%), Question # 11, F (1, 175) = 8.98, $p < .01$ and Question # 16, F (1, 167) = 6.20, $p < .025$. The only other statistically significant effect ($p < .10$) found was the age main effect in Question # 16, F (1, 167) = 9.64, $p < .01$, mean response for the under 30 group = 40% and over the 30s = 60%. The older teachers professed a stronger genetic bias than younger teachers. (There were no significant interactions, $p > .10$).

The type of school results were striking in that both Questions # 11 and # 16 revealed a significant bias of private school relative to public school teachers who professed a belief in a genetic I.Q. It should be emphasized here that no main nor interactive effects associated with geographic region approached significance, (Fs < 1.00).

If one assumes that an acceptance of the genetic model of intelligence is correlated with personality characteristics that may be described as elite and exclusive, we offer at least two interpretations of our results. (1) After joining the ranks of a private school, which by definition is exclusive in the sense of not being public, the teacher tends to assimilate the elitist values of the institution. If this analysis is correct then we should have found a type of school x age interaction with young private and public school teachers professing a similar enviornmentalist position but older private shool teachers responding more positively to the genetic

Conclusion

The evidence presented here clearly demonstrates that private school and older teachers profess a stronger bias towards a genetic model of intelligence than public school and younger teachers. We speculatively interpreted these results in terms of the teacher's and school's selection procedures. Whether or not these professed attitudes and an *apriori* knowledge of student I.Q. scores affect formal and/or informal aspects of teaching and teacher-student relations was not assessed, although there is evidence to support such an assertion (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

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position. We found no evidence for this interaction nor one that would indicate that public shcool teachers learn to profess an environmental attitude. (2) Our type of school main effect supports the notion that both teachers and schools are self-selecting. That is, teachers with a genetic viewpoint seek employment in private schools and private schools tend to hire teachers with a genetic orientation.

Another interesting result relevant to the previously mentioned finding was the response pattern of private versus public school teachers to the question.... "From your experiences there is strong evidence for 'racial intelligence' (differences in innate intelligence between races)," Question # 23 (unfortunately this question was only asked of the northeast samples). Private school teachers tended to agree with this statement more than public school teachers, F, (1, 105) = 2.86, $p < .10$. No main or interactive effects approached significance, Fs < 1.00.

Pertaining to professed knowledge of their students I.Q. scores (Question # 3, "Describe your knowledge of your students I.Q. scores.") northeastern teachers knew less about their student's I.Q. scores than southeastern teachers, (mean response for northeast = "familiar with a few" and southeast = "I know most") F (1, 177) = 110.86, $p < .01$ and public school teachers have less I.Q. score information than private school teachers (mean public school response = "familiar with a few" and mean private school response = "familiar with 50%"), F (1, 177) = 4.11, $p < .05$.

Earlier we mentioned that older teachers professed a stronger belief in the genetic I.Q. model than younger teachers. Interestingly enough the former when asked whether teachers should know the I.Q. scores of their students (Question # 18) agreed with the statement, whereas the latter did not, F (1, 178) = 8.60, $p < .01$.